

October 18, 2012

The Hon. Vic Toews
Minister of Public Safety
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON Canada K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Toews:

We write as a group of concerned Chaplains serving within the Correctional Service of Canada at various institutions across Canada in response to the decision not to renew part-time contracts with faith communities for the provision of chaplaincy services within Correctional Service Canada (CSC). We are deeply concerned about this decision and saddened by the impact it will have on those whose spiritual lives are fed and nurtured through these services – especially since removing 49 part-time chaplains will affect significant numbers of volunteers, negatively impacting their ability to share their time and talents with inmate populations.

In the October 10, 2012 edition of The Montreal Gazette, and again in the October 16th edition of the Calgary Herald, in a letter to the editor you stated:

The government of Canada funds full-time spiritual advisers to provide spiritual services to prisoners. These advisers can be of any faith and will make themselves available to provide spiritual advice to the general offender population. Additionally, there are over 2,500 individuals who provide spiritual services to prisoners of many faiths on a voluntary basis.

This approach supports the freedom of religion of prisoners while ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used wisely and appropriately.

We believe that describing chaplains as “advisers” reflects a misunderstanding of the breadth of services we provide. The work of Chaplains’ include providing a “visible presence” to those within the institution, including times of crisis intervention; leading worship services and officiating at rites and sacraments; offering religious education and pastoral care; developing community involvement; and facilitating the activities offered by volunteers. While it is true that volunteers are an essential part of the Chaplaincy services within CSC, the professional spiritual care and guidance provided by chaplains is work that cannot simply be handed over to “volunteers”.

The current provision of chaplains is based on a ratio of 1 full-time chaplain to every 150-200 inmates. Each full-time contract, except one, is held by a Christian faith community. Additional chaplaincy contracts were negotiated as needed for these services on a part-time basis developed. This was particularly important in order to address the population numbers of Christian and non-Christian faith traditions in various parts of the country. It made fiscal sense to meet the presented need with part-time contracts for service. Those who serve in these part-time chaplaincies have done so faithfully, contributing to the public safety of Canada as part of Chaplaincy teams committed to dynamic security within CSC institutions across the country. They have become trusted and respected colleagues to full-time Chaplains, Management and Staff.

As a result of the decision by your office, all opportunities to provide non-Christian faith communities in the inmate population with part-time contracted professional chaplaincy services of their faith tradition will end. Whether intentional or not, the result of the decision appears discriminatory. Its effect, with only one exception, will be the elimination of all contracts with non-Christian religious organizations. This, we believe, infringes a fundamental freedom guaranteed to all Canadians through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms – the freedom not just to profess a particular religion but to practise that religion. Statistics from the last fiscal year indicate, and our direct experience indicates that 20% of the inmate population self-identified with a religion other than Christian. We do not believe that an increased reliance on volunteers from non-Christian traditions will ensure each of these offenders the right to practise the religion of her/his choice.

Chaplains together with the Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy within CSC (the IFC) and, with other faith groups, have worked through the IFC, to ensure appropriate and effective chaplaincy services are provided. The IFC was not consulted as part of the recent review of chaplaincy within CSC. We find this lack of consultation particularly disturbing.

In 2011, representatives of the four partners (CSC, the IFC, faith communities, and chaplains) developed a report on the "Enhanced Partnership Model," which included the following principles:

PRINCIPLE NO 1: We work together as partners for the provision of inter-confessional chaplaincy. ... Independent initiatives or actions taken by one partner, even with the best of intentions, without consulting with the other partners usually do not serve chaplaincy well. As partners, we are committed to working together and that means that key issues are dealt with not uni- nor duo-laterally, but as a team of four equally important partners. [...]

PRINCIPLE NO 2: Clear, open and two-way communication is essential to dynamic relationships among the four partners cooperating in the Enhanced Partnership Model. ... Communication that happens between partners must be clear and open, on-going, bi-directional (conversational), and as often as possible consultative rather than solely informative or worse yet, after-the-fact.

We would invite you and the appropriate officials of the CSC to return to these principles of partnership and consultation. We believe the decision that has been taken concerning part-time contracts for chaplaincy services is indeed one that does "not serve chaplaincy (or our nation) well". We can work together to ensure the chaplaincy services provided to the inmates and staff within CSC are the best that can be offered and are responsive of the spiritual needs of the various faith communities represented by the institutions' populations. As partners in the International Prison Chaplaincy Association (IPCA), we have worked very hard to have CSC and its Chaplaincy become a leader in progressive policies regarding religious diversity, a model for the world to follow..

We encourage you to rescind the decision not to renew contracts for the provision of part-time chaplaincy services, to recommit the funding necessary to allow for the provision of these part-time contracts, and to initiate appropriate consultation on this matter involving all the partners in Chaplaincy. In closing, we join with many other Canadians in recognizing and celebrating the diversity of the religious and spiritual community within Canada.

Sincerely,

Pierre-Alain Argouin
Lloyd A. Bruce
Bonita Chad
Danielle Chabot
Phil Ferris
Jean-Eudes Fortin

Greg Frazer
Gordon Green
Pierre Héon
Peter Huish
Oliver Johnson
Zia Khan
Ramon Noble

Pamela Pederson
Jean Périgny
Kevin Sawyer
Tim Smart
Helen Tervo
Paul Vanderham
Fergy Wilson

copies: The Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister
The Hon. Thomas Mulchair, Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. Bob Rae, Interim Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
The Hon. Randall Garrison, Opposition Shadow Cabinet, Public Safety
The Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia, Liberal Critic, Public Safety
Don Head, Commissioner, CSC
Rev. Rick Burk, Director General, Chaplaincy, CSC
Ms. Monique Marchand, President, IFC